

## U.S., Germany say Russia poses 'urgent' challenge to stability

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The United States and Germany said Wednesday that Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's border poses an "immediate and urgent challenge" to European security and that any intervention will draw severe consequences.

But the country's top diplomats left open what those consequences would be and how differences on arming Ukraine and a controversial Russian gas pipeline will be resolved.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock sought to present a unified front on Russia after a meeting in Washington.

"Both Germany and the United States see Russia's

actions toward Ukraine as an immediate and urgent challenge to peace and stability in Europe," Blinken said. "We condemn Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders, as well as Russia's increasingly harsh rhetoric as it continues to push the false narrative that Ukraine seeks to provoke (Russia)," he said. "That's a little bit like the fox saying it had no choice but to attack the henhouse because somehow the hens presented a threat." Baerbock agreed. "We jointly reiterated that Russian actions and activities come with a clear price tag, and a renewed violation of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia would have severe consequences," she said.

*Continued on next page*



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock speaks during a news conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the State Department, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a news conference with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at the State Department, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

#### Continued from Front

The Blinken-Baerbock meeting followed a telephone call last week between President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, a conversation Sunday between Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and a group discussion Tuesday among Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his counterparts from the five Nordic nations.

It also preceded a flurry of meetings involving NATO foreign ministers, senior U.S. and Russian officials, the NATO-Russia Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe set for next week.

"The real question is whether Russia is serious about diplomacy, serious about de-escalation," Blinken said. "Let's see where this goes over the next weeks."

Western officials have hinted at any number of economically crippling sanctions that could be imposed should Russia act. Those include near total cutoff from the international financial system and steps toward greater NATO integration with non-allied European nations.

But, there have been very few specifics and Blinken again declined to discuss them. "I'm not going to telegraph them publicly, but I can tell you with great confidence that a tremendous amount of work has been done already. There is very strong coordination and collaboration and very strong agreement on measures that would be taken in the event of renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine."

As the Biden administration moves to build international consensus around a set of possible punitive measures, Germany is clearly the linchpin. Securing the support of Europe's biggest economy will be key to both messaging and implementation of whatever is decided. Baerbock is the top diplomat in the first German government in 16 years not headed by Angela Merkel. She has struck a tougher tone on Russia than her predecessor. But Germany has adopted a less confrontational stance toward Russia compared with many other European nations.

Germany's business ties with Russia could provide leverage, but they could also prove a hindrance for forging a united front toward

Moscow. Despite strong criticism from the U.S., the center-left government of new Chancellor Olaf Scholz hasn't shown itself willing to block the start of natural gas deliveries through a newly built pipeline linking Russia and Germany — a move that would hurt both countries.

Under Merkel, Germany persuaded the Biden administration last year not to impose sanctions on the company building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which many believe will leave Europe beholden to Russia for energy and Ukraine more vulnerable.

Blinken noted that the pipeline, while completed, has yet to go into operation and said gas flows through it would be unlikely if Russia invades Ukraine.

"If Russia renews its aggression toward Ukraine, it would certainly be difficult to see gas flowing through it in the future," he said. This actually gives the EU leverage over Russia, he said, rather than the other way around.

Baerbock sidestepped the question of whether the pipeline would be operationalized in the event of a Russian intervention. However,

she said the new German government would abide by an agreement signed last summer with Washington that says Russia will not be allowed to use energy as a political weapon against Europe.

"We agreed on this, together with our European partners, that we would take effective measures together with our European partners, should Russia use energy as a weapon or should it continue its aggressive acts against Ukraine," Baerbock said.

Blinken did not directly address her response but said the U.S. would press ahead with joint measures on the pipeline if necessary.

"We will continue to work in a way that I hope can be effective in dealing with energy issues and challenges, including those posed in our judgment by Nord Stream 2, and also in a way that preserves what is so vital, and that is strong trans-Atlantic solidarity. That is the most effective response and most effective tool that we have in countering Russian aggression," he said.

Nord Stream 2 is a topic of major concern in Washington, and Congress is expected to take up two bills related to it and other Russia sanctions next week, just as the meetings in Europe are happening. A GOP bill would automatically impose Nord Stream sanctions, while a Democratic version would impose a wider range of penalties on Russia should it invade Ukraine.

Both Democratic and Republican lawmakers in Washington have blamed Nord Stream 2 for increasing Russia's leverage over Germany and limiting what Berlin would be willing to do in response to a new invasion. Germany, like much of the European Union, is heavily reliant on Russian natural gas.

Blinken said the U.S. has delivered weapons to Ukraine and would continue to do so in the event of a further Russian military assault on the country.

Echoing concerns by some in Germany that this could stoke military tensions with Russia, Baerbock said "we have a different position on arms supply to Ukraine," but noted that Berlin has provided a military hospital to the Ukrainian army and support in treating wounded soldiers. □

## Survey: Parents increased quality time at pandemic's start

By MIKE SCHNEIDER  
Associated Press

During the first several months of the pandemic in the U.S., Dina Levy made her young daughter and son go on walks with her three times a day.

They kicked a soccer ball around at the nearby high school. The children, then 11 and 8, created an obstacle course out of chalk and the three timed each other running through it. They also ate all their meals together.

Levy is among scores of parents who indicated in a new survey from the U.S. Census Bureau that they spent more time eating, reading and playing with their children from March 2020 to June of 2020, when coronavirus-lockdowns were at their most intense, than they had in previous years.

"With school and work, you split up and go your own way for the day, but during coronavirus, we were a unit," said Levy, an attorney who lives in New Jersey. "It really was, I don't want to say worthwhile since this pandemic has been so awful for so many people, but there was a lot of value to us as a family."

In a report on the survey released this week, the Census Bureau includes some caveats: A large number of people did not respond. Also, compared to previous years, more of the parents in this survey were older,

foreign-born, married, educated and above the poverty level. The survey also does not measure the long-term impact of the pandemic, which is now entering its third calendar year, so it is unknown whether the increased time with the children has stuck.

The findings of the Survey of Income and Program Participation are based on interviews with one parent from 22,000 households during the first four months of the pandemic in the U.S. The survey found that the proportion of meals the so-called reference parents shared with their children increased from 84% to 85% from 2018 to 2020, and from 56% to 63% for the other parents.

Some parents also read to their kids more in 2020 compared to previous years, though there were variations based on income, education and other factors. In 2020, 69% of parents reported reading to young children five or more times per week compared with 65% in 2018, and 64% in 2019, the report said.

"Families knew before the pandemic that they were overstressed. Kids had so many places to be. Parents were juggling an awful lot," Roma Walsh, co-director of the Chicago Center for Family Health at the University of Chicago, said in a phone interview. "The pandemic made people not go to work, and our kids



In this Oct. 2020 photo released by Eugene Brusilovskiy, Eugene holds his then-3-month-old daughter, Aya, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

were home. It really helped parents to say, 'Hey, wait a minute. We are able to have real family time together that we weren't before.'

On the flip side, the report found that outings with children decreased for parents because of travel restrictions and lockdowns, dropping from 85% in 2018 and 87% in 2019 to 82% in 2020. The drop was starker

for solo parents, going from 86% in 2019 to 75% in 2020, according to the survey.

The pandemic also strained many families. The death of loved ones, job losses, financial worries, remote learning, social isolation, and the demands of child and elder care all took a heavy toll, Walsh said.

"The key point is families have experienced extreme stress and strain over the

course of this prolonged pandemic," Walsh said. She said her research shows that families do best when they share positive values, take a creative approach to problem-solving and have the flexibility to adapt.

"Those families that can pull together and practice resilience are doing well, and it actually strengthens their bonds," she said.

That was certainly the case for Eugene Brusilovskiy, a statistician living in suburban Philadelphia. He said the pandemic allowed him to be with his daughter, who was born during the early months of the virus's spread. Since he was working from home, he and his wife decided not to put her in day care as originally planned.

"I was involved in every routine, everything from feeding her to changing her diapers," Brusilovskiy said. "I was able to spend real quality time, to go on walks and watch all of those first milestones that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise."

Although many people are limiting their activities now with the omicron-driven resurgence of the coronavirus, it's possible that once schools reopened in 2021 and kids returned to their extracurricular pursuits, parents fell back into earlier habits, said Melissa Milkie, a University of Toronto sociologist. □

## Biden, Obama, Pelosi to speak at Harry Reid's funeral

**LAS VEGAS (AP)** — President Joe Biden, former President Barack Obama and congressional leaders will speak at Harry Reid's funeral in Las Vegas on Saturday, a spokesperson for the late Senate Majority Leader said Wednesday.

"We are honored to have such a distinguished group paying tribute to Harry's life and accomplishments," Landra Reid, the late senator's wife, said in a statement. "These are not only some of the most consequential leaders of our time – they are also some of Har-

ry's best friends."

Obama is scheduled to deliver Reid's eulogy, while Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer will also speak at the 11 a.m. ceremony at the Smith Center for Performing Arts in downtown Las Vegas.

Reid died last week after a years-long battle with cancer. He retired from the U.S. Senate in 2016 after representing Nevada for five terms, including 12 years as the chamber's top Democrat.

Elder M. Russell Ballard, a senior leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will also speak. Carole King and Brandon Flowers of the Las Vegas-based band The Killers will perform.

After services, Reid's remains will be transported to the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, where he's scheduled to be honored in a Jan. 12 ceremony. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nev., gestures during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, on June 26, 2007. □



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nev., gestures during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, on June 26, 2007.

Associated Press

# Philadelphia fire kills at least 13, including 7 children

By RON TODT and CLAUDIA LAUER

**PHILADELPHIA (AP)** — Fire tore through a duplex home early Wednesday in Philadelphia, killing 13 people, including seven children, fire officials said. At least two people were sent to hospitals, and officials warned the toll could grow as firefighters searched the rowhome, where 26 people had been staying.

The four smoke alarms in the building, which was public housing, do not appear to have been working, fire officials said. The blaze's cause was not determined, but officials shaken by the death toll — apparently the highest in a single fire in the city in at least a century — vowed to get to the bottom of it.

"I knew some of those kids — I used to see them playing on the corner," said Dannie McGuire, 34, fighting back tears as she and Martin Burgert, 35, stood in the doorway of a home around the corner.

"I can't picture how more people couldn't get out — jumping out a window," she said.



Philadelphia firefighters work at the scene of a deadly row house fire, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022, in the Fairmount neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Officials did not release the names or ages of those killed in the blaze, which started before 6:30 a.m. As many as eight residents appear to have been able to escape the fire, which burned in a residential area of the Fairmount neighborhood, northwest of downtown and home to the Philadelphia Museum of

Art and its famous "Rocky steps." Streets around the fire scene remained blocked off in midafternoon as investigators worked. Onlookers and neighbors had largely migrated to a nearby elementary school, where relatives and friends of the home's residents gathered to wait for news.

Associated Press

A small group of people, some wrapped in Salvation Army blankets, stared down 23rd Street, where the blaze happened, hugging one another and crying. Several friends of the children stopped by the school, hoping for information, after their texts and calls went unanswered. Rabiya Turner said she

rushed to the home this morning to bring clothes to cousins who were able to escape the blaze. People gathered at the school for warmth and someone to talk to, she said.

"It's just like floating — everybody's floating," she said before rushing away.

Officials held a news conference earlier in the day, near the fire scene.

"It was terrible. I've been around for 35 years now and this is probably one of the worst fires I have ever been to," said Craig Murphy, first deputy fire commissioner.

"Losing so many kids is just devastating," said Mayor Jim Kenney. "Keep these babies in your prayers."

First lady Jill Biden, who along with President Joe Biden has deep ties to the Philadelphia area, tweeted, "My heart is with the families and loved ones of the victims of the tragic fire in Philadelphia."

Crews responded around 6:40 a.m. and saw flames shooting from the second-floor front windows in an area believed to be a kitchen, Murphy said. □

## Treasure hunters sue for records on FBI's Civil War gold dig



This Sept. 20, 2018 file photo, Dennis Parada, right, and his son Kem Parada stand at the site of the FBI's dig for Civil War-era gold in Dents Run, Pa.

Associated Press

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM  
Associated Press

Treasure hunters who believe they found a huge cache of fabled Civil War-era gold in Pennsylvania are now on the prowl for something as elusive as the buried booty itself: govern-

ment records of the FBI's excavation.

Finders Keepers filed a federal lawsuit against the Justice Department over its failure to produce documents on the FBI's search for the legendary gold, which took place nearly

four years ago at a remote woodland site in northwestern Pennsylvania.

The FBI has since dragged its feet on the treasure hunters' Freedom of Information Act request for records, their lawyer said Wednesday. "There's been a pattern of behavior by the FBI that's been very troubling," said Anne Weismann, who represents Finders Keepers. She questioned whether the agency is "acting in good faith."

A message was sent to the Justice Department seeking comment on the suit, which asks a judge to order the FBI to immediately turn over the records.

Finders Keepers' owners, the father-son duo of Dennis and Kem Parada, had spent years looking for what, according to legend, was an 1863 shipment of Union gold that was lost or stolen on its way to the

U.S. Mint in Philadelphia. The duo focused on a spot where they say their instruments detected a large metallic mass.

After meeting with the treasure hunters in early 2018, the FBI brought in a contractor with more sophisticated instruments. The contractor detected an underground mass that weighed up to nine tons and had the density of gold, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed last year at the request of news organizations, including The Associated Press.

The Paradas accompanied the FBI to the site in Dent's Run, about 135 miles (220 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, but say they were confined to their car while the FBI excavated. The FBI has long insisted the March 2018 dig came up empty, but the agency has consistently stymied the Paradas' efforts to obtain

information. The FBI initially claimed it had no files about the investigation. Then, after the Justice Department ordered a more thorough review, the FBI said its records were exempt from public disclosure. Finally, in the wake of the treasure hunters' appeal, the FBI said it had located 2,400 pages of records and 17 video files that it could potentially turn over — but that it would take years to do so. Finders Keepers asked the Justice Department for expedited processing, which can be granted in cases where there is widespread media interest involving questions about the government's integrity. The Justice Department denied the request — and, as of last month, had yet to assign the FOIA request to a staffer for processing, according to the lawsuit. □

## Bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria come under attack

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA

**BAGHDAD (AP)** — Iraqi military bases hosting U.S. troops in Iraq's western Anbar province and the capital of Baghdad were hit by Katyusha rockets Wednesday while in Syria, eight rounds of indirect fire landed inside a base with members of the U.S.-led coalition, the Iraqi and U.S. militaries said.

No casualties were reported in the three attacks, part of a series that began on Monday, the anniversary of a U.S. airstrike that killed top Iranian general Qassim Soleimani in Baghdad two years ago.

According to an Iraqi officer, an Iraqi base housing U.S. troops in the western Anbar province was hit with five Katyusha rockets on Wednesday evening; three other rockets fell outside the base's parameter. The officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said U.S.-led coalition forces at the base were forced into shelters by the barrage.

There was no immediate comment from the coalition, which is in Iraq to help fight the Islamic State group. No one claimed re-



Parts of the wreckage of a drone are laid out on the ground near the Ain al-Asad airbase, in the western Anbar province of Iraq. Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022.

sponsibility for the attacks, but they were believed to be launched by Iran-backed militias.

Earlier Wednesday, the Iraqi military said a rocket launcher with one rocket was located in a residential district in western Baghdad, an area used in the past by Iran-backed militias to fire at the airport.

In eastern Syria, mean-

while, the rounds hit a base run by the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces with a small coalition advisory presence. The coalition said in a statement there was minor damage. Coalition forces, acting on intelligence, responded by firing six rounds of artillery towards the point of origin of the attack just outside the eastern town of Maya-

deen, a stronghold of Iran-backed fighters, the statement said.

The statement said "Iran-supported malign actors fired ... from within civilian infrastructure with no regard for civilian safety." It said that hours earlier, U.S.-led coalition forces had observed several launch sites near the base known as Green Village. Coaliti-

tion forces conducted several strikes to eliminate the threats, it added.

"The Coalition reserves the right to defend itself and partner forces against any threat, and will continue to do everything within its power to protect those forces," said Maj. Gen. John W. Brennan, Jr., commander of the joint task force.

On Monday, two armed drones were shot down as they headed toward a facility housing U.S. advisors at Baghdad airport. Two explosives-laden drones targeting an Iraqi military base housing U.S. troops in western Anbar province were destroyed on Tuesday.

The 2020 U.S. drone strike at Baghdad's airport killed Soleimani, who was the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces.

Pro-Iran Shiite factions in Iraq have vowed revenge for the killing and have conditioned the end of attacks against the U.S. presence in Iraq on the full exit of American troops from the country. □

## Israeli committee OKs 3,500 settlement homes in Jerusalem

**JERUSALEM (AP)** — A local Israeli committee on Wednesday approved plans for the construction of more than 3,500 settler housing units in east Jerusalem, nearly half in a particularly controversial area, according to Peace Now, an anti-settlement monitoring group.

Peace Now said the construction of the homes would largely cut off the city from the southern part of the occupied West Bank, further complicating any efforts to create a functioning Palestinian state. The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to refrain from settlement construction. The projects were approved by a municipal committee and will be considered by a district committee on Jan. 17. It would likely be years be-

fore any construction takes place, but Peace Now says once the approval process is underway, it becomes increasingly difficult to stop. One plan would build 1,465 housing units between Givat Hamatos and Har Homa, two especially controversial settlements, further cutting off east Jerusalem from the Palestinian city of Bethlehem and the southern West Bank. Another 2,092 homes would be built elsewhere in east Jerusalem.

Israel captured east Jerusalem on the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and views the entire city as its capital. It considers the West Bank to be the bibli-

cal and historical heartland of the Jewish people. Israel's current government, which includes parties from across the political spectrum, has ruled out any major initiatives to resolve the decades-old conflict but has taken limited steps to improve living conditions in the occupied territories.

The Jerusalem municipality says it is committed to building in all parts of the city for the benefit of Jewish and Arab residents. But discriminatory policies make it nearly impossible for Palestinians to legally build new homes or expand their neighborhoods, while Israel encourages the expansion of settlements intended for Jewish residents.

Authorities are advancing "far-reaching plans that post facts on the ground that undermine the possibil-



This photo taken Feb. 14, 2017, shows a construction worker in the Har Homa neighborhood in east Jerusalem.

Associated Press

ity of peace," Peace Now said in a statement. A similar plan to build some 9,000 housing units on the site of an abandoned airport in east Jerusalem was placed on hold late last year. The Palestinians view settlements in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank as a major obstacle

to peace. Most of the international community — which overwhelmingly supports a two-state solution to the conflict — considers the settlements to be a violation of international law. The last serious peace negotiations broke down more than a decade ago. □

# EU wants place at table to discuss Ukraine, Russia crisis

By RAF CASERT  
Associated Press

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — The European Union's foreign policy chief insisted on Wednesday that the 27-nation bloc must have a bigger role to play alongside Washington and Moscow to defuse the West's standoff with Russia over Ukraine.

In the diplomatic flurry surrounding the Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border the EU has largely been a bystander. This highlights a deeper frustration in Brussels: even though the EU is a massive global economic powerhouse, its strategic geopolitical footprint remains disproportionately small.

"There are not two actors alone. It's not just the US and Russia," said Josep Borrell during a visit to Ukraine on Wednesday. "If you want to talk about security in Europe, the Europeans have to be part of the table."

So far, the EU's plea for a bigger role has largely fallen on deaf ears.

U.S. President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have spoken twice over the past month, before two days of talks between senior U.S. and Russian officials starting Sunday in Geneva. Those talks will be followed by a meeting of the Russia-NATO Council on Jan. 12



**European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, center right, visits the Stanitsa Luganskaya border crossing between Ukraine and the territory controlled by pro-Russian militants in the Luhansk region, Ukraine, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022.**

and negotiations at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Jan. 13.

And on Friday, NATO's 30 foreign ministers will already set the scene for those encounters. The EU is involved in none of them.

Borrell stressed that this had to change. "If Russia is really willing to talk about the security in Europe, then Europeans have to be part of it. Not the first day," he acknowledged, "But is that is not going to last just one day or one week."

He said EU foreign ministers would assess next week in Brest, France, how to get the EU's foot in the door.

"We are going to discuss the way in which we are going to have our say in these talks through coordination with the US and possibly with the Russians," Borrell said. "Like it or not, they will have to talk with us. Be sure of that."

The United States has assured its European allies it would not do any side deals with Putin without them, and they have

walked in lockstep laying out the threat of prohibitive sanctions in the event of a Russian invasion.

"We're not going to talk above the heads of our European allies and partners. Throughout all of this, it will remain true that we will do or say nothing about them without them when it comes to our NATO allies and our European partners," State Department spokesman Ned Price has said.

To show the EU's commitment to Kyiv, Borrell visited

**Associated Press**

Ukrainian soldiers at the Stanitsa Luganskaya crossing between Ukraine and the territory controlled by pro-Russian militants in the Luhansk region.

Since the Crimean Peninsula's annexation by Russia and the Kremlin's backing of a separatist rebellion in Ukraine's east, the fighting has killed over 14,000 people and devastated the country's industrial heartland, known as the Donbas. For years now, the EU has championed the principles of diplomacy's so-called soft power of economic and non-military aid, since it lacked the political wherewithal to build up a powerful defense and security part in its common project. So far, it has yet to emerge as an essential player, even on its own continent.

Since the 2014 invasion of Crimea, European diplomacy has been spearheaded by the so-called Normandy format, bringing together Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany. The Minsk agreements that came out of it remain one of the best avenues for a fundamental solution.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Wednesday that France's "efforts alongside Germany to achieve that remain total and will continue in the coming days and weeks." □

## Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, UAE join Security Council



**In this image provided United Nations Photo, Gabon Ambassador to the United Nations Michel Xavier Biang, speaks during a flag installation ceremony for new members of the United Nations Security Council, Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022, at U.N. headquarters.**

**UNITED NATIONS (AP)** — The U.N. Security Council

got five new members Tuesday, as Albania, Bra-

zil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates formally took up the posts they won in an election in June.

Ambassadors made brief remarks, installed their countries' flags alongside those of other members outside the council chambers, and posed for a group photo — wearing face masks and standing apart, in an acknowledgment of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The flag ceremony is a tradition that Kazakhstan started when on the council in 2018.

The 15-member council is the U.N.'s most powerful

body. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States are permanent members, with veto power.

Other members are elected by the 193-member General Assembly for staggered, two-year terms that are allocated by global regions.

Estonia, Niger, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam finished their terms Friday.

Countries often campaign for seats for years. Winning gives them a say on peacekeeping missions and the council's other approaches to conflict hotspots, plus a strong voice

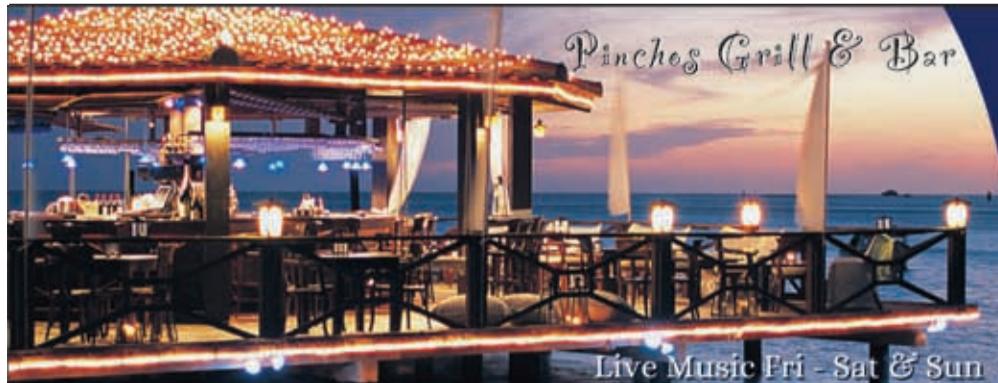
on overarching issues of international peace and security.

Council members also can convene meetings on security topics of particular interest to them, and smaller countries get to share a prominent platform with world powers.

Albania is joining for the first time, while Brazil is taking an 11th turn. Gabon and Ghana each have been on the council three times before and the UAE once.

More than 50 of the U.N.'s 193 member countries have never been elected to the council since it formed in 1946. □

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## Report: Kazakh president's home ablaze as protests escalate

**MOSCOW (AP)**— Protesters in Kazakhstan's largest city stormed the presidential residence and the mayor's office on Wednesday and set both buildings on fire, according to new reports, as demonstrations sparked by a rise in fuel prices in the Central Asian nation escalated sharply.

Police fired on some protesters at the presidential palace before fleeing. They have clashed repeatedly with demonstrators in recent days, deploying water cannons in the freezing weather, tear gas and concussion grenades.

The government resigned in response to the unrest and the president vowed to take harsh measures to quell it. In possibly the first of those efforts, Kazakh news sites became inaccessible late in the day, and the global watchdog organization Netblocks said the country was experiencing a pervasive internet blackout.

Although the protests began over a near-doubling of prices for a type of liquefied gas that is widely used as vehicle fuel, the size and rapid spread of the unrest suggest they reflect wider discontent in the country that has been under the rule of the same party since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Kazakhstan, the ninth-largest country in the world, borders Russia to the north and China to the east and has extensive oil reserves that make it strategically and economically important. Despite those reserves and mineral wealth, discontent over poor living conditions is strong in some parts of the country. Many Kazakhs also chafe at the dominance of the ruling party, which holds more than 80% of the seats in



Riot police walk to block demonstrators during a protest in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022.

Associated Press

parliament.

Hours after thousands of demonstrators gathered outside the presidential residence in Almaty, Russia's Tass news agency reported that it was on fire and that demonstrators, some wielding firearms, were trying to break into it. Police fled from the residence after shooting at demonstrators, according to the report, which was filed from Kazakhstan.

Many of the demonstrators who converged on the mayoral office carried clubs and shields, according to earlier reports in Kazakh media. Tass later said the building was engulfed in flames.

Protesters also broke into the Almaty office of the Russia-based Mir television

and radio company and destroyed some equipment, the broadcaster said. It later reported that a crowd broke into the Almaty building of the Kazakh national broadcaster.

The protests began Sunday in Zhanaozen, a city in the west where resentment of the government was strong in the wake of a 2011 oil-worker strike in which police fatally shot at least 15 people. They spread across

the country in the following days and on Tuesday large demonstrations broke out in the capital, Nur-Sultan, and in Almaty, the country's largest city and former capital.

The protests appear to have no identifiable leader or demands.

In a televised statement to the nation on Wednesday, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that "we intend to act with maximum

severity regarding law-breakers."

Tokayev said police have died in clashes with demonstrators, but there were no immediate casualty figures for police or civilians.

In the statement, he also promised to make political reforms and announced that he was assuming the leadership of the national security council. The latter is potentially significant because the council had been headed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was president from 1991 until he resigned in 2019.

Nazarbayev dominated Kazakhstan's politics and his rule was marked by a moderate cult of personality. Critics say he effectively instituted a clan system in government.

After the demonstrations spread to Almaty and the capital, the government announced its resignation, but Tokayev said the ministers would remain in their roles until a new Cabinet is formed, making it uncertain whether the resignation will have significant effect.

Tokayev has declared a two-week state of emergency for both the capital and Almaty, imposing an overnight curfew and restricting movement into and around the cities.

At the start of the year, prices for the gas called LPG roughly doubled as the government moved away from price controls — part of efforts to transition to a market economy. □

# LOCAL



## Ike's Bistro unveils vegan smorgasbord

EAGLE BEACH — Ike's bistro at Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa surprises with an excellent, tasteful and varied vegan menu. Executive Chef Sandro Herold is obviously enthusiastic about the new offerings that fill up the place already. "People nowadays are a bit more conscious about what they eat. This menu offers a wide variety with creative vegan food items." We

asked some of the guests about their experience: "delicious", "very tasty" "great food, great setting". Even teens, in general not too fond of health food, applauded the offerings. "We did not even miss the meat". Of course the restaurant also offers their extensive regular menu for the non-vegan guests containing all you wish From the Land or From the Sea.



Vegan is hot now, says the chef, and we had that confirmed by several guests. Ike's Bistro is an open air restaurant, located in the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa. Under a huge cabana with a view to the romantically lit pool of the resort you are seated in relaxed chairs and served by great waiters. And not unimportant: Covid-19 safe.

Your senses are tickled because of the purity and freshness of the food items. You may choose for the unknown which is a three-course vegan chef tasting menu that can also be combined with a wine pairing. Or you select your choices from the menu. All dishes are 100% Vegan and are gluten-free unless labeled otherwise. Start with appetizers like Vegan Fish Taco, Chickpeas Tartare and Avocado, Spicy Buffalo Cauliflower Wings or Vegetable Tempura. Tomato Basil Soup or Lemongrass Carrot Ginger Soup are simply delicious as are the Arugula Jackfruit Salad or Mesclun Salad. For the main course pick your pick: Sesame Ginger Duck (contains gluten), Stuffed Corn Chips and Avocado, Grilled Fish Filet and Roasted Cauliflower or Truffle Porcini Risotto & Grilled Tofu. This heavenly healthy trip reaches its end destination with a scrumptious dessert: Caribbean Snickers, a must-try! All of those choices embrace your inner senses with their freshness and clear flavors.

Vegan might be on the menu in many restaurants nowadays as 'the other option', but here at Ike's Bistro they celebrate vegan and you get hooked, that is a promise. Passion, creativity, purity, dedication to a concept and a beautiful setting take care of an enchanting experience. Vegans and non-vegans are welcome, Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa has got it all covered.□

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**Ike's bistro**  
MEDITERRANEAN & CARIBBEAN

# The Centrale Bank van Aruba increases the reserve requirement to the pre-COVID-19 level of 12.0 percent

ORANJESTAD — During its meeting of November 22, 2021, and after reviewing the most recent economic and monetary data, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA) decided to increase the reserve requirement rate from 11.0 percent to 12.0 percent as of December 1st, 2021. This decision was primarily based on the elevated level of excess liquidity at the commercial banks.

The following information and analysis were considered in reaching this decision:

#### International reserves

International reserves (including revaluation differences of gold and foreign exchange holdings), up to and including November 5, 2021, strengthened by Afl. 586.9 million compared to the end of December 2020. The notable expansion in the international reserves was mostly the result of net inflows of foreign exchange reserves attributed to tourism services and loans from the Government of the Netherlands provided to the Government of Aruba (GoA) to improve its liquidity position. Meanwhile, official reserves increased by Afl. 321.3 million. Consequently, the official and international reserves reached, respectively, Afl. 2,529.3 million and Afl. 2,943.6 million as of November 5, 2021. Accordingly, the level of reserves remained adequate when benchmarked against the current account payments and the IMF ARA.

#### Credit developments

In September 2021, total credit of the banking sector contracted by Afl. 78.0 million or 2.0 percent to Afl. 3,886.1 million, when compared to the end of 2020. This was driven by the categories 'business loans' (-Afl. 33.3 million or -2.2 percent) and 'loans to individuals' (-Afl. 30.8 million or -1.6 percent). The drop in the category 'loans to individuals' was caused by a decrease in 'consumer credit', while the category 'business loans' was for the most part impacted by less commercial mortgages and current account loans.

#### Inflation

In September 2021, the CPI rose by 2.2 percent, com-

pared to the corresponding month a year earlier (Graph 2). The twelve-month average inflation rate amounted to -0.7 percent in September 2021, 0.4 percentage point higher than the previous month. The rise in the CPI, when compared to a year earlier, was mainly the outcome of upward price movements in the components 'transport' and 'household operation'. The former was related to the trending oil price hike leading to a higher gasoline price, while the latter was likely due to global supply chain issues.

#### Commercial bank liquidity

The aggregate excess liquidity of commercial banks rose to Afl. 1,308.3 million in September 2021, compared to Afl. 1,107.4 million in De-

cember 2020.

A monthly comparison showed, however, that the aggregated excess liquidity declined from Afl. 1,508.3 million in August 2021 to Afl. 1,308.3 million in September 2021. This contraction is associated with the rise in the reserve requirement rate as of September 1, 2021, paired with the increase in the prudential liquidity ratio from 15 percent to 18 percent as of the same date. However, the uptick in the reserve requirement rate and the prudential liquidity ratio was mitigated by a surge in the total liquid funds of the commercial banks. Consequently, the level of excess liquidity remained high and is significantly above pre-pandemic levels.

The ample excess liquid-

ity is partly the effect of the reductions in the reserve requirement rate and the minimum prudential liquidity ratio as of March and April 2020, forming part of the monetary and prudential policy domains relief measures taken by the CBA to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the continued subdued credit demand is an additional contributing factor to the commercial banks' excess liquidity, and likely so were the wage subsidy and FASE programs of the GoA to countermeasure and contain the economic effects of the COVID-19 contagion.

Consequently, the prudential liquidity ratio of the commercial banks, which measures the percentage

of their liquid assets to their total net assets, remained at a comfortable level in September 2021 (38.3 percent), far above the minimum required prudential liquidity ratio of 18.0 percent.

#### Anticipated outflows due to de-escalation initiatives by the CBA

Despite the comfortable level of official and international reserves, the CBA anticipates a hike in payments to non-residents, attributed to the lifting of the previously introduced foreign exchange restrictions, as per September 2021. The latest forecasts show a total estimate of at least Afl. 252.5 million to flow out by the end of 2021.

For more information go to [www.cbaaruba.org](http://www.cbaaruba.org). □

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## Holiday Inn Resort Aruba: Because love never ends



**PALM BEACH — Holiday Inn Resort Aruba showers you with love to celebrate the most important event of your life: your wedding. Whether it is a small, intimate happening between the two of you, a gathering with your closest friends and family or a larger group, the resort has it covered. There is one woman who will guide you through it all, from the start to the end. She assures you that everything is arranged for up to the tiniest details, just the way you imagined it. Let us introduce to you Shulaika Isenia, Holiday Inn's wedding specialist. "I am here to make it happen!"**

Her calm appearance and skilled way ease every nervous bride-to-be or worried future groom. Shulaika works thorough in a subtle and open minded way. "It is very important to listen close to my client's wishes. To observe and know all the details, that is where it all starts with. My task is to translate the client's

wishes into reality to full satisfaction." Her job is to make things easy, take away the stress and she is great at that.

### From A to Z

The process begins with contacting the Holiday Inn Resort Aruba where you will be connected to Shulaika. The Holiday Inn Resort Aruba is flexible and details can be adjusted to your personal taste. "Picture yourself and your loved one on the turquoise blue ocean side where it feels as if the beach is all yours. Our resort has this great advantage to be able to offer our wedding guests their 'own corner' where they have the full bar area for themselves, located right on the wide beach." Holiday Inn Aruba Resorts stands out with their personal approach and upscale service and their Food & Beverage is known all over the island for its consistent quality, quite important on the day of your life. "After the night the resort has their wedding suite made up



for you and this means awakening in the romance of the Caribbean sun next morning with the ocean and white-sanded beach stretching in front of you while you enjoy your breakfast." Three romantic wedding packages offer you amazing possibilities where you can be each other's sunshine under Aruba's beautiful blue skies and turquoise waters, witnessing your "I do's" in a very intimate ceremony (package My Sunshine) or make your special day unique with a group of 20 loved ones, to share the event where you promise to love and stay with each other forever and always with your inner circle (package Promises). If you would like to take it up a notch then tie the knot where love transcends all barriers and

all limits, let Holiday Inn Aruba Resort be the one to make this act of overflowing love happen in one of a kind way (package Love Unlimited). Important to mention is that Shulaika and her team are flexible and arrangements can be adjusted to fulfill your exact wishes. All arrangements by the Holiday Inn Aruba Resort include marriage on the stunning beach with the services of a non-denominational minister, including a wedding certificate as a keepsake. Feel queen and king under the arch of squared bamboo or a circular arch with choice of drapery color and crystals, depending on your choice of package. The signing table, bridal bouquet, matching groom's boutonniere are all part of the life happening and a live musician, pho-

tographer and/or videographer are options to consider.

### Don't worry, be happy

Put your faith in the hands of Shulaika and her team to organize your vow renewal, engagement or wedding, she will gain your trust in an instant. The island of Aruba and the Holiday Inn Aruba Resort will make you feel secure as all Covid-19 protocol is in place here and your safety is our priority. Discover Aruba, live your dream event at the Holiday Inn Aruba Resort. We promise you: the resort and the island will make sure you will remember this a lifetime!

**For more information:**  
Contact Shulaika Isenia at +297 586 3600 or send an email to shulaika.isenia@ihg.com.□



# How to attract busy contractors to your home remodel

By ANNIE MILLERBERND of NerdWallet

Brian Gawthrop has waited over six months to remodel his home.

The Washington state-based certified financial planner and his wife have a long enough wish list to keep a contractor busy: a kitchen remodel, new flooring, a new deck and many other upgrades.

They did a cash-out refinance last summer, which lowered their mortgage rate and gave them money to use toward home improvements. They planned to start soon after receiving the cash, but by mid-December Gawthrop still hadn't found the right contractor.

Contractors say pandemic-prompted home remodels have kept their schedules full, while labor and material shortages have extended project timelines. That means the next contractor you call may be more selective about the projects they accept, and your quote may be higher than you expected.

Here's how to stand out in a crowd of homeowners vying for a contractor's at-



A workman cuts sections of a beam at a housing site in Madison County, Miss., Tuesday, March 16, 2021.

tention.

## GET A REFERRAL

A contractor may be more likely to call you back if an existing customer refers you. You can try a friend, family member or neighbor who's had work done recently. Mike Williams, owner of Maryland Professional Contractors, says when he has dozens of voicemails,

referrals get the first calls back. Williams says he enjoys working with new customers, but the referral network supports his business. "That base supports about seven full-time employees right now," he says. "I know that was there before this boom, so I'm pretty sure after the boom we'll have that referral base."

**Associated Press**

You might also use your real estate agent. Williams says about half of his referrals come from agents.

## BE PATIENT — AND NICE

For Williams, summer is the busy season and demand starts to drop in the fall; last year, however, he stayed busy through the end of the year. Renovation timelines could be delayed by

backlogged city permit requests, a shortage of subcontractors and backordered materials.

Christina Starmer, building contractor at CenterBeam Construction in Jacksonville, Florida, says she returns every customer's call, but acknowledges that not all contractors do.

"I think it's really important to be extremely kind to the customers and call them back, but the customers right now are just extremely frustrated because they can't get anyone to pick up the phone," she says.

Frustrating as it is, don't let anger get the best of you. Starmer says renovations are hard work, and a little empathy goes a long way. If someone is unkind early on, Starmer assumes they'll be unkind to her staff as well, and usually moves on to a new client.

## KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Research finishes, like cabinets and countertops, before calling a contractor because they can make a big difference in the project's cost, says Jonathan Larkin, sales manager of St. Paul, Minnesota-based JoNick Construction. □

# OPEC, allies keep gradually pumping more oil amid omicron

By DAVID McHUGH AP  
FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— OPEC and allied oil-producing countries decided Tuesday to pump more oil to the world economy amid hope that travel and demand for fuel will hold up despite the rapid spread of the omicron variant of COVID-19.

The 23-member OPEC+ alliance led by oil cartel member Saudi Arabia and non-member Russia said it would add 400,000 barrels per day in February, sticking with a road map to slowly restore cuts in output made during the depths of the pandemic.

Oil prices rose with the news: U.S. crude traded 1.7% higher on the New York Mercantile Exchange, at \$77.32 per barrel, while international benchmark Brent crude was up 1.5%, at \$80.28. The decision

left few market ripples because it had been broadly expected.

After the first reports about the ultra-contagious omicron variant in late November, oil prices plunged and stocks slid. But prices have since recovered and markets calmed down. Analysts say vehicle traffic and aviation activity suggest that omicron, while it is dominating headlines and raising concerns about hospital capacity, may wind up not drastically reducing demand for fuel.

Oil prices also are being supported because some countries have not been able to keep up with their share of production, limiting supply.

OPEC's oil production increases are gradually restoring deep reductions made in 2020, when demand for motor and

aviation fuel plummeted because of pandemic lockdowns and travel restrictions. At times, OPEC+ hasn't moved fast enough in raising production for U.S. President Joe Biden, who has urged producing countries to open the taps wider to combat surging gas prices and aid the economic recovery.

The U.S. and other oil-consuming countries on Nov. 23 announced a coordinated release of oil from strategic reserves in an effort to contain rising energy prices that have helped fuel inflation and raised politically sensitive gasoline prices for U.S. drivers. Yet Biden's move is seen as having only a muted effect on prices. Oil prices climbed more than 50% last year as many pandemic restrictions eased and as the world learned how to bet-



In this April 8, 2020 file photo, the sun sets behind an idle pump jack near Karnes City, USA.

**Associated Press**

ter cope with precautions against the virus. The omicron surge comes as the global economy is still in the process of healing: growth has surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the U.S. but is only expected to do so in Europe in the first months of the year. A recent decline in U.S. gasoline prices — which

**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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1 Base meal 45 Iditarod

5 Propeller need parts

11 Skin woe DOWN

12 Speak from memory

13 Whiskey serving

14 Show clearly

15 Acted obsequiously

17 Completely

18 Corduroy feature

22 Sharpened

24 Like haunted houses

25 Easter find

26 Sturgeon eggs

27 Fields

30 Gushes forth

32 Museum piece

33 Lend a hand

34 Diamond-backs, e.g.

38 Craving

41 Track shape

42 Immediately

43 Polynesian idol



10 Take in

11 Having a low pH

12 Fairy tale monster

13 Unoriginal creation

14 End a suit

15 Make coffee

16 Thrill-seeker

17 Expand

18 Peepers

19 Get news of

20 Reached base,

21 Yard tool

22 Fairy tale in a way

23 Monster ointment

24 Uncommon vowel

25 Plunked down

26 Junior, to senior

27 Fairy tale in a way

28 Broad-casting

29 Uncommon vowel

30 Plunked down

31 Cockpit occupants

32 Uncommon vowel

33 Uncommon vowel

34 Uncommon vowel

35 Prepared to drive

36 Bit of ointment

37 Greek vowel

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39 Greek vowel

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### OTHER

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Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
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Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
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American Airlines	582 2700
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Alcoholics Anonymous Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia Relacional Tel. 583 5400

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# Crafts: Indie makers get creative with yarns, dyes

By KIM COOK

When you see a nice handmade sweater, you know it took a while to make.

The knitting or crocheting is just part of it. (A fun online calculator at [www.lovecrafts.com](http://www.lovecrafts.com) estimates how long anything from a basic scarf to a blanket, baby booties or patterned garment would take you; figure on 20 to 80 hours.)

Before that, however, there are those who make the yarns. Indie craftspeople are doing new things with wool and other fibers, including recycled plastic, as well as with dyes.

Samantha Myrhe, owner of RavensWood Fibre Co. in Nova Scotia, Canada, began a dozen years ago with a few sheep, and her third generation of lambs was shorn this fall. She sells her yarns online and at local markets, and gives her original dyes original names, like Sea Glass, a blend of dreamy water hues; Fireflies, with starry, night sky colors; and Autumn Drive, evoking a ride through a fall forest.

"Dyeing is chemistry," she says. "Although the process we use is a simple, heat-and-acid-vinegar process to set the colors, the chemistry behind it involves the binding of a color molecule to a wool molecule. More or less molecules, more or less intense color."

She found that using water from the local municipal system created unpredictable colors, so she turned to well water instead. Still, there's an element of chance: more rain means more minerals in the water. "More minerals mean my reds may be more orange, my blacks break and go to gold. It's crazy," she says.

Myrhe has a good group of reliable, "stable" colors, but also what the indie dye world refers to as OOAKs: One of a Kind.

"The magic of what the dye gods give me that day," she says.

Different fibers take dye in different ways. Alpaca hues tends toward pastel, as it doesn't absorb as much color. Nylon and silk soak up dye, and when



This photo provided by Ravenswood Fibre Co. shows some of their wool. Ravenswood Fibre Co.'s Sam Myrhe celebrates the fall with her Autumn Grandeur colorway, a mix of softly-blended golds, rusts, greens and browns.

Associated Press

blended with merino wool, give beautiful color depth. Some dyers are exploring other types of wool, including yak, cashmere, and Australian Polwarth sheep, which has a strong, silky character good for many woven projects.

Wool gets high marks for sustainability; as the International Wool Textile Organization notes, it's renewable, biodegradable and recyclable. Around the world, many farms, studios and workshops are producing yarns and other textile products using techniques with a gentle environmental impact, including recycling water and using few if any additives.

Britt-Marie Alm, who runs Love Fest Fibers in San Francisco, offers small-batch yarns sourced from sustainably operated workshops on the West Coast, Nepal and Tibet. Alm has had a decades-long love for Tibetan culture since joining a high school community service project in the region. She has learned spinning and weaving techniques from Tibetan

artisans, and now supports several women-run collectives there and in the U.S. Her soft, chunky yarns include Color Core, in which she spins ethically sourced merino wool around a colorful organic cotton fiber; the result looks like a woolly Twizzler. Alm came up with the idea during the pandemic.

"I was spending more time inside, as we all were, and I became captivated by the incredible weavings made by customers who were exploring the inside of our yarn," she says. "Their techniques centered around cutting yarns to show the inner cross-section, and it was fascinating — the textures and color gradations were just stunning."

With her Washington State mill partners — a mother-daughter team who also raise a few alpacas — she developed seven Color Core colorways.

Love Fest also has a naturally shed, downy yak yarn called kulu, which feels like cashmere, without the sheep shearing.

"Recent years have seen

a reimagining of what yarn can make," Alm says. She cites a range of knitted and crocheted home goods, from baskets and rugs to pillows and poufs. The chunky yarn and huge stitches that makes these projects possible, she says, is more than visually striking. "It's also very gratifying to be able to make a project so quickly. This has captured the imagination of a new generation of fiber artists who learn the skills to knit a chunky basket and then continue on to explore macrame and weaving," she says.

Sustainable options for yarn now also include upcycled linen and plastic fiber.

"I grew up crocheting and knitting so much polyester and acrylic yarn; it seemed such a shame that more recycled materials weren't being utilized," says Alm.

She worked with her mill to create ReLove, a fiber that blends plastic water bottles with merino to make a soft, chunky yarn available in colors like denim, curry, fog and leche. Sets contain 40 yards of yarn, which res-

cues about 10 plastic bottles from landfills, she says. Other notable independent operations include farm/mill combos like Red Hill Fiber Mill in Taswell, Indiana, which raises alpacas, gives educational tours, and spins and sells yarns and wool products gleaned from their herd. Lydia Christiansen's Abundant Earth Fiber, on Whidbey Island north of Seattle, includes wool spun from East Friesian sheep that graze just down the road from her mill.

Yarn enthusiast Michelle Thymmons has compiled a list of popular Instagram yarn dyers across North America and Europe on her website [www.vamicreations.com](http://www.vamicreations.com). They include a multi-generational family at Bumblebee Farm in Davis, Illinois, who raise sheep and rabbits, dye and make their own knitting fibers, and host yarn clubs themed around Harry Potter, "The Lord of the Rings" and "Game of Thrones."

Knit and pattern designer Norman Schwarze in Munich, Germany, has a globe-spanning compilation at [www.nimble-needles.com](http://www.nimble-needles.com) that includes Vivid Wool outside Reykjavik, Iceland; Wishbone yarns in South Africa, and The Blue Brick in Ontario, Canada. The company Yarnspirations has developed a new format for the yarn ball itself — a Lifesaver-shaped ring called an O'Go that it says is less prone to tangles. O'Go is available under various brands and in a range of colors.

Myrhe and Alm say indie-made dyes and yarns tell stories that make a knitted piece feel more precious to its wearer.

Myrhe loves the journey the dyes take her on. Often her best finds, she says, are "happy accidents," and she tries to write everything down promptly. "I've lost many a treasure thinking I would remember and record later. I didn't remember, and the most beautiful copper red eluded me for years, only to be found accidentally once again a few months later." □

# Novak Djokovic denied entry to Australia, has visa canceled

By JOHN PYE

**BRISBANE, Australia (AP)**

— Novak Djokovic was denied entry into Australia and had his visa canceled after arriving in Melbourne late Wednesday to defend his title at the season-opening tennis major.

The Australian Border Force issued a statement early Thursday local time saying Djokovic failed to provide appropriate evidence to meet entry requirements and "has visa has been subsequently canceled."

The top-ranked Djokovic flew in after receiving a medical exemption from the strict coronavirus vaccination requirements in place for the Australian Open, where he is a nine-time winner.

Australian media reported that Djokovic's team had applied for the wrong type of visa for a person with a medical exemption.

Djokovic's lawyers are expected to appeal the decision, which came after the 20-time major winner had to spend more than eight hours at the Melbourne Tullamarine Airport waiting to find out if he would be allowed into the country.

Djokovic's father, Srdjan



Serbia's Novak Djokovic after defeating Croatia's Marin Cilic during their Davis Cup tennis semi-final match at Madrid Arena in Madrid, Spain, on Dec. 3, 2021.

Djokovic, told the B92 internet portal that his son was held "in a room which no one can enter" at the airport, guarded by two policemen.

Djokovic's participation in the Australian Open has become a hot political topic, with many Australians furious that he was granted an exemption to enter the country. Meanwhile, Serbian President Aleksandar

Vucic said on Instagram that spoke to Djokovic while he was being held at the airport, and added that Serbian authorities were taking measures "so the harassment of the best tennis player in the world be stopped in the shortest possible time."

Speculation of a possible issue with the visa emerged while Djokovic was in transit and escalated with mixed

messages from federal and state lawmakers.

Djokovic's revelation on social media that he was heading to Australia seeking a record 21st major title sparked some debate and plenty of headlines on Wednesday, with critics questioning what grounds he could have for the exemption and backers arguing he has a right to privacy and freedom of choice.

**Associated Press**

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley defended the "completely legitimate application and process" and insisted there was no special treatment for Djokovic.

The Victoria state government-mandated that only fully vaccinated players, staff, fans and officials could enter Melbourne Park when the tournament starts on Jan. 17.

Only 26 people connected with the tournament applied for a medical exemption and, Tiley said, only a "handful" were granted.

Among the reasons allowed for those applying for a vaccination exemption can include acute major medical conditions, serious adverse reaction to a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, or evidence of a COVID-19 infection within the previous six months.

Djokovic tested positive for the coronavirus in June 2020 after he played in a series of exhibition matches that he organized in Serbia and Croatia without social distancing amid the pandemic.

Concerns about Djokovic's visa status took a while to circulate. □

## Look for Norway to top medal table again at Winter Olympics

By STEPHEN WADE

**AP Sports Writer**

The Winter Olympics open in 30 days, and Norway is expected to head the medal standings for the second straight time, even topping its record haul of 39 medals in 2018 in Pyeongchang, South Korea. This is the prediction of U.S.-based Gracenote Sports, which released its medal table forecast on Wednesday with the Beijing Winter Games opening on Feb. 4.

Nielsen-Gracenote supplies statistical analysis to sports league around the world. Its Olympic numbers are based off computer models that analyze the most recent results in major competitions — and smaller ones — in the run-up to Beijing.

Norway is predicted to win 22 gold medals and 45

overall. More than half of Norway's medals are predicted to come in cross country skiing and biathlon. Second place, if total medals is used for the ranking order, will be the Russian Olympic Committee with 11 gold and 32 overall. The team in Beijing, as in Tokyo, will be known as the ROC, or the Russian Olympic Committee.

The ROC must compete without its national flag or anthem, fallout from a state-backed doping program dating from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Many critics say the punishment is negligible since athletes still compete in national colors.

Under the IOC guidelines, the athletes will represent not their country, but the ROC.

Germany is picked to finish

third with 12 gold and 25 overall. After this, the next seven countries are closely grouped. They are: United States (7 gold, 22 overall), Canada (6-22), Sweden (7-21), Switzerland (5-21), Netherlands (6-20), Austria (5-18), and France (2-18).

Japan is expected to produce its most overall medals in a Winter Olympics with 17, including four gold medals. Host nation China is predicted to win six gold and 11 overall.

The Beijing Olympics have been shrouded in controversy with the United States and several other countries declining to send any high-ranking political representatives to Beijing. At the heart are allegations of crimes against humanity that target mostly Muslim ethnic minorities in the northwestern region of Xin-



Staff members hold up medals as they rehearse a victory ceremony at the Beijing Medals Plaza of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, China on Jan. 3, 2022.

**Associated Press**

season. And, of course, last-minute entry lists can change if athletes test positive for the coronavirus.

"Hopefully we have the kind of forecast which gets us as close as we usually do," Gleave told The Associated Press. □

# Riddell's Axiom could be breakthrough helmet for football

By BARRY WILNER  
AP Pro Football Writer

Riddell has developed a football helmet that might not be just the next big step in design and player safety, but a major leap.

While there has been a focus on position-specific headgear for sometime, Axiom is a personal-fit helmet. It is designed and manufactured player by player rather than position by position.

Axiom's features are based on data and designed to improve impact response, reduce head impact exposure (HIE), and deliver unprecedented protection. Axiom includes a new fitting system, a redesigned helmet shell platform, reimagined face-mask system and integrated smart helmet technology called In-Site — which analyzes and reports on HIE compared to Riddell's database of 8 million on-field player impacts. Axiom also features a removable visor.

"We don't want to call it a crowning achievement, we get up every day and try to improve player protection," says Thad Ide, senior vice president of research and development for Riddell. "But we do feel Axiom is a very different helmet platform than we have seen



This photo provided by Riddell shows former NCAA college football athlete and profession model Manny McCord wearing an Axiom helmet at Natural Light Studio in Dallas, Texas, Oct. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

before, and potentially a great leap forward."

There are several key elements to Axiom that could make it the safest head protection football — and pretty much any sport — has seen.

The fitting system uses technology that scans the surface of a player's head to build a helmet that matches the fit of the head. The scans can be done on a phone app by a coach or equipment manager or a player — by anyone, re-

ally. The data are loaded into Riddell's database and then a built-to-fit helmet for the individual athlete is made.

Shells of the Axiom are engineered to surround the head with a combination of flex panels that work in tandem with internal liners and a face protection system to improve impact response.

As for the new facemask, it removes the top bar to provide additional flexing, more energy-managing

material and a better impact response. A cast construction available in both stainless steel and titanium and a unique elliptical shape will provide and a sweeping view of the field for each player.

"We don't know how long it will take for players to get used to seeing the field better," Ide explains, "but there is also a lot of design freedom with the face guards. Anything you can mold you can turn the face guard into."

Among the more intriguing aspects of the Axiom is the visor, something popular with running backs, receivers and defensive backs — about 600 players wear them — but not a lot of other positions. Yet.

This is the first football helmet to offer a standard factory-installed visor.

"There's a two-push button to remove the visor, however it is part of the protective suite within the helmet," Ide says. "Feedback has been good but it is different, and there are some players who simply aren't going to wear a visor, which is why we made it easy to remove."

"We've collected feedback from field test participants, elite college athletes who were wearing them, and more were leaving them on. The feedback we have gotten is Axiom fits like a precision-fit helmet," Ide adds, "that it tracks exactly with the players' heads. There's no helmet lag if you turn quickly."

Versions of Axiom have been tested for use the past three seasons at select colleges and high schools. Florida State, Penn State, UCLA, Rice, Stanford, Oregon State, Bowling Green, Colorado and SMU are among the FBS schools to have players wear them. □

## New year, same Pack: Green Bay still No. 1 in AP Pro32 poll



Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers acknowledges the crowd after an NFL football game against the Minnesota Vikings Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, in Green Bay, Wis. The Packers won 37-10.

Associated Press

By SIMMI BUTTAR  
AP Pro Football Writer  
**NEW YORK (AP)** — New year, same old Green Bay Packers.  
The Packers dominated the

Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night to clinch the top seed in the NFC and home-field advantage throughout the conference playoffs.

With the best record in the NFL heading into the last week of the regular season, the Packers kept the top spot in the latest AP Pro32 poll.

The Packers earned all 12 first-place votes for 384 points in balloting Tuesday by media members who regularly cover the NFL. "For the second straight year, the NFC's road to Super Bowl 56 goes through Green Bay," Newsday's Bob Glauber said.

"Now we see if the Packers can take advantage of the No. 1 seed after Aaron Rodgers got them this far with what will almost certainly be a second straight MVP. A brilliant quarterback keeps getting better." The Tampa Bay Bucca-

neers moved up two spots to No. 2.

The Los Angeles Rams climbed two spots to No. 3. The Rams, who have won five in a row, can clinch the NFC West on Sunday with a victory over the San Francisco 49ers.

The AFC West champion Kansas City Chiefs fell two spots to No. 4 after a last-second loss to the Cincinnati Bengals, who clinched their first AFC North title since the 2015 season with a 34-31 victory. The Bengals moved up two spots to No. 7.

Despite having the AFC's top seed at the moment, the Tennessee Titans are at No. 5 in the poll. The Titans inched up a spot after routing Miami and can wrap

up home field with a win at Houston on Sunday.

The Arizona Cardinals rocketed five places to No. 6 after topping the Dallas Cowboys. The Cardinals can clinch their division with a win over Seattle and a Rams loss on Sunday. The Cowboys fell five spots to No. 8 and will finish the regular season at the Philadelphia Eagles on Saturday night.

The Buffalo Bills fell two spots to No. 9 after topping the Atlanta Falcons. The Bills can clinch the AFC East with a win on Sunday against the New York Jets. And the New England Patriots remained at 10. The Patriots need to beat the Dolphins and have the Bills lose to take the division. □